

United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service Aviation Safety Alert

No. 2002-18

July 22, 2002

Page 1 of 2

Subject: Bell 407 Main Rotor Blade Airworthiness

Area of Concern: Helicopter Operations

Distribution: All Aviation and Fire Personnel

Discussion: On July 16, 2002 a Bell 407 helicopter was on short final to a helibase in Arizona when the pilot experienced a slight yaw to the left, shaking of the cyclic, and a vibration in the helicopter. The pilot chose to take the aircraft to an open flat field approximately ¼ of a mile away to avoid possible injury to personnel on the ground at the helibase. After the helicopter was shut down the aircraft was inspected and it was discovered that the skin on the underside of one of the main rotor blades had de-bonded and separated from the blade tip extending inboard approximately 8 ½ inches. The skin tore away from the blade along a line at the aft lower edge of the leading edge abrasion strip and de-bonded aft approximately four inches. The occurrence is currently under investigation to try to determine the cause of the failure.

The USDA Forest Service is asking all contractors to assure airworthiness of all Bell BHT 407 Main Rotor Blades. This assurance is required prior to further flight after receipt of this safety alert. Regional Aviation Maintenance Inspectors in the Forest Service Regions will be notified as to the status of all contracted (exclusive use or all when needed) Bell BHT 407 helicopters.

If any abnormalities are noted or suspected the aircraft is not to be flown and the operator needs to notify a Forest Service Maintenance Inspector immediately.

For further information on the event that occurred in AZ, contact Larry Hindman, R-3 Regional Aviation Safety Manager (505) 842-3351, or Ron Livingston, Acting R-3 Regional Aviation Maintenance Inspector (505) 842-3356.

/s/ Ron Hanks

USFS National Aviation Safety and Training Manager

